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ABSTRACT

To identify areas of concern in technical institute accreditation, 69 reports encompassing 1,631 comments of accreditation evaluation teams of two regional and four specialized accrediting agencies were analyzed. In addition, a survey of the opinions of officials in 93 technical institutes in the regions served by two regional accrediting agencies was conducted. Based on the relative frequency of comments in accreditation evaluation team reports, technical institutes appeared to have common weaknesses in complying with accreditation requirements, including: (1) inadequate library holdings, (2) inadequate or limited physical facilities, (3) excessive teaching loads, and (4) failure to develop, clearly define, and adhere to formal policies and procedures within the institution. The survey of technical institute officials revealed that the officials generally felt that regional accrediting agencies did not fully understand the philosophy, purposes, and operational characteristics of the institutes. Major challenges identified by the institute officials included: (1) reconciling conflicting expectations between accrediting agencies and other agencies, (2) successfully developing appropriate physical facilities, student activities, and faculty and student loads, and (3) developing effective criteria and procedures for faculty and staff evaluation and promotion. (SB)

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A Summary Report of the Study

"Areas of Concern in Technical Institute Accreditation"

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PREFACE

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools has been engaged in the accreditation of institutions offering vocational-technical education for many years, including both secondary and collegiate institutions. Until the early 1960's, vocational-technical education programs were offered primarily in high schools accredited by the Commission on Secondary Schools, and community/junior colleges accredited by the Commission on Colleges.

During the 1960's, a large number of post-secondary occupational education institutions were established in the eleven-state region served by the Association. Some of these were degree-granting technical institutes and some were post-secondary non-degree occupational education institutions. For accreditation purposes, it was determined that degree-granting technical institutes clearly fell within the purview of the Commission on Colleges of the Association. However, the most effective means of accreditation of post-secondary non-degree occupational education institutions was not apparent. At the recommendation of the Commission on Colleges, a Southwide Conference on Occupational Education was formed by the Association which ultimately led to the creation of the Commission on Occupational Education Institutions in 1971. This Commission is currently accrediting post-secondary non-collegiate institutions of occupational education.

The first degree-granting technical institute was accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association in 1962, and the second in 1964. During the period 1964-1971, thirty additional two-year degree-granting technical institutes were accredited by the Commission on Colleges. An assessment of the Commission's effectiveness in the accreditation of degree-granting technical institutes during this period was needed. Therefore, the study reported in this document was supported by the Commission on Colleges and its findings are particularly pertinent to a review of the Commission's success in technical institute accreditation.

The scope of this study included all two-year degree-granting technical institutes in the geographic regions served by both the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. Therefore, the findings of this study are applicable, to some extent, to all of the regional accrediting agencies. Further, the study included an analysis of the accreditation of specialized occupational curricula by selected specialized accrediting agencies, and therefore, includes some implications for specialized accreditation.

The findings of this study have identified areas which need further improvement in the Commission's activities related to technical institute accreditation. Study is currently being made of these areas. For example, a series of workshops is now being planned for assisting technical institutes in the identification of accreditation requirements, familiarization with accreditation procedures,

and the conduct of institutional self-studies. Additional efforts in these areas were major recommendations of the study described here.

While this study of technical institute accreditation identified areas where improvement is needed in the accreditation process, major strengths were also identified. For example, while technical institute officials made suggestions for improvement, the positive value and effectiveness of regional accreditation was overwhelmingly affirmed. The study showed that many of the criticisms currently directed at regional accreditation are not shared by those most directly involved—technical institute officials.

This study represents a major contribution to resolvement of the complex issues and difficulties involved in the accreditation of technical institutes. The Commission is committed to improvement of its procedures and practices in this area of accreditation, and this study has been valuable in identifying those areas which should receive further attention.

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INTRODUCTION

It was the purpose of this study to identify areas of concern in technical institute accreditation. The study was based on the assumptions: (1) that the relative frequency of comments in accreditation evaluation team reports would identify areas of concern resulting from application of the accreditation process; (2) that technical institute officials would cooperate in the development and use of a survey instrument to identify areas of concern; and (3) that such other sources of information as the literature on accreditation and the professional experience of the investigator in the field of accreditation would assist in the identification of additional areas of concern.

Subsequently, 69 reports encompassing 1,631 comments of accreditation evaluation teams of two regional and four specialized accrediting agencies were analyzed. Likewise, a survey of the opinions of officials of 93 (93.1% return) technical institutes in the regions served by two regional accrediting agencies was conducted. The literature relating to accreditation and the observations of the investigator in accreditation activities provided additional sources of information.

Information from the primary sources was categorized and related to various items of background information on technical institutes and their officials to ascertain consensus or statistically significant differences of opinions regarding identified areas of concern.

SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS

Accreditation Evaluation Team Reports

Based on the relative frequency of comments in accreditation evaluation team reports, technical institutes appeared to have common weaknesses in complying with accreditation requirements. Technical institutes did have such quantitative shortcomings as inadequate library holdings, inadequate or limited physical facilities, and excessive teaching loads (Table 1). However, areas of greatest concern generally resulted from the failure of technical institutes to develop, clearly define, and adhere to formal policies and procedures within the institution. Included were such matters as lack of clear policies and procedures for curriculum development and revision, evaluation of instruction, and admissions.

TABLE 1

Composite Frequency Distribution of All Team Comments in Reports Reviewed

Item	Major and Sub-Categories of Taxonomy	Frequency of Comments	Rank of Category
	EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM		
1	Admission, Retention, and Graduation Requirements and Procedures	62	6
2	Advisory Committees	16	33.5
3	Curriculum	275	1
4	Instruction	96	2
5	Instructional Facilities and Equipment	80	4
6	Students	21	25
	FACULTY		
7	Faculty Committees and Faculty Organizations	17	32
8	Faculty Competence	34	19.5
9	Faculty Evaluation and Promotion	32	21
10	Faculty Professional Growth and Development	51	9
11	Faculty Recruitment and Retention	44	15.5
12	Faculty Work Loads and Supportive Services	76	5
	FINANCIAL AFFAIRS		
13	Financial Procedures and Practices	39	17
14	Financial Resources	23	23
15	Preparation and Control of the Budget	45	13.5
16	Purchasing, Receiving, and Control of Inventory	16	33.5
	LIBRARY		
17	Library Collection and other Learning Resources	57	7
18	Library Facilities and Equipment	47	11
19	Library-Faculty Relationships	18	30.5
20	Library Financial Resources	21	25
21	Library Personnel	45	13.5
22	Library Records, Procedures, and Services	44	15.5

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Item	Major and Sub-Categories of Taxonomy	Frequency of Comments	Rank of Category
	ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION		
23	Administrative Organization	90	3
24	Governance and the Governing Board	20	27.5
25	Planning, Research, and Public Relations	19	29
26	Policies and Procedures	51	9
	PHYSICAL FACILITIES		
27	Buildings and Equipment	46	12
28	Campus Development and Security	18	30.5
29	Expansion of Physical Facilities	13	36
	PURPOSE		
30	Purpose	14	35
	STUDENT SERVICES		
31	Specialized Student Services	51	9
32	Student Activities	38	18
33	Student Conduct and Student Rights	7	37
34	Student Counseling, Advising, and Orientation	30	22
35	Student Records	21	25
36	Student Services Facilities and Equipment	34	19.5
37	Student Services Personnel	20	27.5
	TOTAL	1631	

Note: An average rank was assigned to those items having equal frequencies of team comments.

Areas of concern identified in accreditation evaluation team reports varied to a limited extent depending upon selected variables. While no statistically significant differences were found, the type of accrediting agency (regional or specialized) conducting an evaluation, enrollment, scope of educational program, age of institution, and population of the area served by technical institutes appeared somewhat related to problem areas identified.

In essence, comments in accreditation team reports were useful in identifying common deficiencies of technical institutes in meeting accreditation requirements. The difficulties encountered by technical institutes related to these deficiencies represented major areas of concern in technical institute accreditation.

Survey of Opinions of Technical Institute Officials

Based on the relative frequencies of responses to 99 items of the survey instrument, *areas of greatest concern* were identified. Technical institute officials generally felt that regional accrediting agencies did not fully understand the technical institute—its unique philosophy, purposes, and operational characteristics. The officials felt that some aspects of evaluative criteria and procedures, and certain decision-making practices of accrediting agencies were not appropriate for technical institutes thereby reflecting this lack of understanding. The need for greater coordination of regional and specialized accreditation procedures was noted.

The opinions of technical institute officials were influenced, in some instances, by the effect of *selected variables*. For example, the number of diploma or certificate full-time curricula offered by technical institutes, appeared to account for statistically significant differences among opinions of officials of

large and small institutions regarding evaluative criteria of regional accrediting agencies.

Based on frequencies of responses, the relative importance of certain areas of concern, expressed as *challenges encountered in obtaining or maintaining regional accreditation*, were identified. Major challenges included: reconciling conflicting expectations between accrediting agencies and other groups, such as state or federal agencies, related to the institution; successfully developing appropriate physical facilities, student activities, faculty and student loads, follow-up of graduates, library utilization, library holdings, and admissions policies; employment of appropriately qualified library staff; and developing effective criteria and procedures for faculty and staff evaluation and promotion (Table 2).

TABLE 2

Challenges Presented in Technical Institute Accreditation: Rank and Average Value for Each Challenge

Rank	Challenges Presented in Technical Institute Accreditation	Average Value
	In order to adequately prepare for regional accreditation, technical institutes experienced difficulty in:	
1.5	. . . successfully reconciling certain conflicting expectations between the accrediting agency and state, local or federal agencies involved in the operation of the institution.	+45
1.5	. . . designing and funding appropriate physical facilities which will meet accreditation expectations.	+45
3	. . . formulating and successfully providing appropriate student activities and services to meet the expectations of the accrediting agency.	+33
4.5	. . . the development of workable course scheduling which will fulfill the expectations of the accrediting agency for faculty and student loads.	+29
4.5	. . . developing and successfully maintaining a comprehensive follow-up program of graduates for determining the effectiveness of the educational program offered by the institution.	+29
6	. . . obtaining faculty and student utilization of the resources and services of the library in accordance with the expectations of the accrediting agency.	+27
7	. . . finding and acquiring a sufficient quantity of pertinent library holdings to meet the expectations of the accrediting agency.	+25
8	. . . successfully justifying non-traditional student admissions policies to the accrediting association.	+23
9	. . . finding and employing professional library staff which can both meet accreditation requirements and understand the unique features of technical institute libraries.	+22
10	. . . developing effective criteria and procedures for faculty and staff evaluation and promotion.	+19
11	. . . employing faculty and staff members which meet the academic requirements of the accrediting agencies.	+17
12.5	. . . producing documentary evidence for such things as student achievement, faculty committee deliberations, advisory committee sessions, routine administrative decisions, library usage, etc.	+15
12.5	. . . developing an acceptable method of determining faculty salaries and promotions.	+15
14	. . . properly orienting business or industrial representatives to the accreditation process.	+ 7
15	. . . securing adequate financial resources to meet accreditation requirements.	0
16	. . . successfully familiarizing representatives of the accrediting agency with the purposes and objectives of the institution.	— 2
17	. . . properly orienting members of the governing board to the accreditation process.	— 3

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Rank	Challenges Presented in Technical Institute Accreditation	Average Value
18.5	. . . developing an effective program for the encouragement of professional growth activities on the part of the faculty.	— 8
18.5	. . . properly orienting students to the accreditation process.	— 8
20.5	. . . properly orienting teaching faculty to the accreditation process.	—11
20.5	. . . obtaining the involvement of faculty and staff in institutional affairs to the degree that accrediting agencies require such involvement.	—11
22	. . . preparing a complete file of formal course outlines, course syllabi or other course materials.	—16
23	. . . formulating written institutional policies and procedures.	—18
24	. . . properly orienting administrative officers to the accreditation process.	—32
25	. . . maintaining adequate housekeeping and maintenance services to meet accreditation expectations.	—34
26	. . . providing information requested in questionnaires provided by the regional accrediting association.	—38
27	. . . the development or maintenance of acceptable permanent records for faculty, students, library, finances, etc.	—48

Note: An average rank was assigned to those challenges having equal frequencies of team comments.

Strengths and weaknesses of regional accreditation, as viewed by technical institute officials, were identified through analysis of "write-in" responses to certain items of the survey instrument. Major *strengths* included: promotion of institutional improvement; improvement of institutions through self-evaluation; improvement of status and recognition for technical institutes; and provision of generally accepted standards of quality for technical institutes (Table 3). Major *weaknesses* brought out feelings that: regional accrediting agencies utilized inappropriate evaluative criteria; agencies were too traditional; and agencies utilized visiting teams which lacked sufficient knowledge of technical institutes (Table 4).

TABLE 3

Strengths of Regional Accreditation Identified by Technical Institute Officials
N = 59

Strengths Identified	Frequency of Responses
Promotes institutional improvement	18
The self-study process—forces the institution to improve through self evaluation	17
Enhances the status and recognition for technical institutes	15
Provides generally accepted standards for technical institutes	13
Promotes confidence in the institution on the part of students	5
Provides a means of objective and impartial evaluation for technical institutes	5
Facilitates transfer of credits and acceptance of graduates by employers	5
Provides a comprehensive evaluation process for the total institution	4
Promotes eligibility for federal and other sources of financial assistance	3
Improves institutional communications	3
Instills a sense of "confidence" on the part of the institution that it is doing a good job	2
Increased interest in technical institutes by regional accrediting agencies	2

Note: A number of strengths were listed only once.

TABLE 4

Weaknesses of Regional Accreditation Identified by Technical Institute Officials
N = 53

Weaknesses Identified	Frequency of Responses
Inappropriate evaluative criteria for technical institutes	19
Too traditional—not able to adapt to the non-traditional aspects of technical institutes	14
Visiting teams—lack of knowledge pertaining to technical institutes	10
Poor public relations pertaining to the meaning of accreditation	4
Lack of experience with technical institutes	3
Excessive subjectivity in the evaluative process	3
Restricts innovation	2
Accreditation may force a technical institute to compromise its basic purposes	2
Excessive variation among regional associations	2

Note: A number of weaknesses were listed only once.

The relative *degree of helpfulness of sources of assistance* in achieving regional accreditation was identified through analysis of frequencies of responses to items of the survey instrument. Certain techniques were particularly helpful to technical institutes. The most helpful sources, in most instances, were services of accrediting agencies, or procedures inherent in the accreditation process (Table 5).

The *general attitude of technical institute officials* toward regional accreditation was assessed through analysis of responses to several items of the survey instrument. Officials almost unanimously held a favorable attitude toward regional accreditation and considered it an effective process. Technical institute officials felt accreditation did promote institutional improvement, a major goal of accreditation, and that success was achieved in recognizing institutions of acceptable quality, another major goal of accreditation.

Statistical comparisons between responses of selected groups of technical institute officials were made to determine if differences in the identification of areas of concern were related to the extent of actual experience with accreditation by the officials. Only two statistically significant differences were found for the 32 comparisons made. The extent of actual experience with the accreditation process by technical institute officials, therefore, did not appear to be a major distinguishing factor in their identification of areas of concern.

A substantial number of two-year technical institutes possessed regional accreditation, and in some instances, specialized accreditation. In addition, the combined responses of officials of accredited technical institutes did not suggest that the integrity and major goals of their institutions were compromised in order to obtain accreditation status. In most cases, removal of deficiencies in meeting accreditation requirements appeared to result in improvement of the institution.

Use of the survey instrument was valuable in identifying and clarifying areas of concern. The high return of survey forms (93.1%) indicated the willingness of technical institute officials to participate in a study related to accreditation. Recognizing the limitations which occur in the use of mail surveys, the technique did appear effective in this study for obtaining the opinions of technical institute officials regarding many aspects of accreditation.

TABLE 5

Sources of Assistance in Achieving Regional Accreditation: Rank and Average Value of Each Source

Rank	Sources of Assistance	Average Value
	Assistance received:	
1	... by visits to the institution by professional staff members of the accrediting association.	72
2	... by conducting a required institutional self-study.	70
3	... from printed materials provided by the accrediting association.	62
4.5	... by visiting other technical institutes previously accredited.	60
4.5	... through the preparation of questionnaires or reports required by the accrediting association.	60
6	... from the visiting committee chairman at the time of his preliminary visit prior to the time of the actual committee evaluation.	58
7	... through meetings, conferences, or workshops held by the accrediting association.	56
8	... by visiting with staff members in the central offices of the accrediting association.	55
9	... by reviewing materials or reports prepared by other institutions for the accrediting association.	53
10.5	... by having representatives of accredited technical institutes visit on your campus.	51
10.5	... as a result of experience obtained by members of the institution's staff while serving as members of evaluation teams.	51
12	... by reviewing copies of evaluation committee reports of other institutions.	46
13	... from preliminary evaluations of the institution by non-staff representatives of the accrediting association.	28
14	... from professional educational consultants.	26
15	... from consultants assigned to the institution by the accrediting association.	24
16	... by having a "mock" or preliminary team evaluation.	23
17	... from state agencies.	20

Note: An average rank was assigned to those items having equal frequencies.

Relationships were found between areas of concern identified by comments in accreditation team reports and responses of technical institute officials to the survey instrument. Generally, areas of concern in technical institute accreditation identified by comments in team reports were also acknowledged as challenges in complying with accreditation requirements by responses of technical institute officials to items of the survey instrument. In some instances, however, technical institute officials expressed disagreement with certain requirements and practices of accrediting agencies.

Other Sources of Information

Based on the experience of the author and review of the literature on accreditation, there appeared to be insufficient knowledge of current procedures and practices of accrediting agencies. Lack of concensus on major issues in the field of occupational education as well as problems of semantics were also observed. The lack of a common voice on the part of occupational educators has often presented accrediting agencies with the dilemma of not knowing how to best adapt the accreditation process related to technical institutes. Consequently accrediting agencies have not appeared to be as responsive to change as many have desired.

The lack of uniform procedures among accrediting agencies has presented areas of concern in technical institute accreditation. However, the lack of understanding of variations among accrediting agencies, and not the variations themselves, appeared responsible for many of the problems which existed.

Many of the problems associated with technical institute accreditation seemed applicable to all new and developing institutions, and not exclusively to the "type" of institution. However, limited experience with technical institutes (a relatively new "type" of institution) by accrediting agencies has also been a source of difficulties. Increased experience with technical institutes and greater involvement of technical institute representatives in accreditation should, in time, alleviate many areas of concern which currently exist.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings in this study and extensive personal experience with accreditation of technical institutes suggest considerations, or recommendations, for subsequent action.

1. Meaningful and constructive dialogue between accrediting agencies and representatives of technical institutes is needed. Many of the concerns which exist in technical institute accreditation could be resolved through constructive discussion of major issues by those involved.
2. Accrediting agencies should place greater emphasis on activities to:
   (a) describe and communicate the philosophy, purposes, requirements, and practices of accreditation to technical institute personnel;
   (b) assist technical institutes in identifying and complying with accreditation requirements;
   (c) reassess their evaluative criteria, policies, procedures, and practices as they relate to technical institutes;
   (d) obtain greater involvement of technical institute officials in the accreditation process;
   (e) coordinate regional and specialized accrediting activities; and
   (f) develop more uniform policies, procedures, and requirements among accrediting agencies.
3. Representatives of technical institutes should:
   (a) create some formal means whereby a uniform consensual voice for technical institutes may be promulgated and promoted;
   (b) seek to become better informed about accreditation—its philosophy, purposes, requirements, and practices;
   (c) seek the counsel of accrediting agencies, officials of accredited technical institutes, and other knowledgeable sources of assistance in preparing for accreditation; and
   (d) take a more active and positive role in the accreditation process.
4. Greater efforts are needed to determine the role of the technical institute in higher education and the attendant characteristics which would

clearly differentiate between acceptable and unacceptable institutions. Since accreditation is essentially a process of "peer" acceptance of institutions or programs, additional guidelines (criteria) based on normative and other suitable information are needed. Additional studies should clarify "peer" opinion, identify normative practices in technical institutes, and identify other pertinent factors related to effective technical institute accrediting activities.

5. While areas needing improvement are indicated, voluntary accreditation should be preserved. Continuous efforts should be made, however, to improve and adapt the accreditation process to conform with changing conditions and practices in higher education.

6. The use of comments in accreditation team reports, and the survey of opinions of technical institute officials regarding accreditation appeared to be appropriate and valid sources of information for this study. The use of these techniques, with some modification, should be considered in future studies of accreditation.

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